

# City of Cambridge Community Development Department

## **FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

### **GUIDELINES**

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#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) has established a Facade Improvement Program, which offers technical and financial assistance to property owners or tenants seeking to renovate or restore their commercial building facades. **(For those seeking funding only for signage and lighting, please refer to the *Signage & Lighting Improvement Program Guidelines*.)**

The program is part of the City's ongoing efforts to help revitalize its commercial districts as well as businesses that operate outside of a commercial district. The program's objectives are to enhance the physical appearance of storefronts and to build a stronger customer base for individual stores and districts.

The program will provide a matching grant of up to \$35,000 for the funding of well-designed improvements that will coordinate all the important features of the storefront into a more attractive image. This may include the restoration of architectural details, better windows and doors, and well-proportioned signage and lighting. A consultant retained by the City will be available to provide assistance to applicants through the conceptual design stage at no cost to the applicants. Applicants, however, will be responsible to hire licensed architects and contractors to refine this conceptual design and to implement the City-approved plans.

Facade improvements made prior to approval of an application by the Review Committee will not be funded through this program.

#### **II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

All of the following criteria must be met for participation in the program:

- Applicants must be property owners or commercial tenants whose storefronts face onto Cambridge streets;
- Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in program;
- Billboards on property, if applicable, must be permanently removed as part of the improvement;
- Property owners must be up to date on all municipal taxes prior to participation in the program;
- Properties must provide handicap accessibility as required by State law. If such access is infeasible, an application for a variance must be filed with the Architectural Barrier Board;
- Properties must be in conformance with State and local code requirements, including the City's zoning ordinance and building codes; and
- Applicants must comply with all State and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing and permits.

### **III. DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES**

Improvements to be funded by the program must be compatible with the character and architecture of the individual building as well as, to the extent appropriate, with other buildings along the street on which the participating storefront is located. This principle is particularly important for historic buildings and streetscapes. Buildings with significant architectural qualities are strongly encouraged to restore and maintain these features. Improvements for buildings not having notably historic or architectural features should still be carefully considered and be seen as an opportunity to substantially enhance the appearance of the buildings and their streetscapes.

#### **A. Eligible Facade Improvements**

Storefronts should be oriented to the pedestrian and provide visual interest both day and night. Effort should be made to facilitate access into the store and to create a store identity.

The following improvements are encouraged:

1. Restoration of details in historically contributing or significant buildings, and removal of elements which cover architectural details;
2. Window display areas which are appropriately scaled and which facilitate night viewing;
3. Window replacement and window framing visible from the street;
4. Signage that is attractively integrated into the architecture of the building, including the window area, awnings or canopies, and entryways;
5. Awnings or canopies that can be both functional and visually appealing;
6. Landscaping features where appropriate, such as window boxes or planters;
7. Cleaning, repainting or residing of buildings;
8. Street grade entrances which contribute to the active edge along streets;
9. New storefront construction within an existing building; and
10. Removal of handicapped barriers.

Other improvements can be made if they meet the objectives of the Facade Improvement Program and have prior written approval of the City of Cambridge. Prospective applicants seeking full façade improvements that include signage and lighting should refer to the *Signage & Lighting Improvement Program Guidelines* for a more detailed description of signage and lighting eligibility.

#### **B. Ineligible Facade Improvements**

The following are ineligible under the Facade Improvement Program:

1. Removal of architecturally significant features;
2. Unattractive window areas that do not promote or encourage viewing into the store;

3. Store entrances that do not relate strongly to the sidewalk;
4. Alcoves or recesses in the building wall that encourage loitering;
5. Interior improvements or roof repair, not visible from the street;
6. Loading docks or parking entrances and exits that disrupt the flow of pedestrians, particularly along major streets; and
7. Sidewalk repairs.

Projects that are underway or started prior to receiving written approval from the City of Cambridge Community Development Department are not eligible to participate in the Facade Improvement Program.

### **C. Prior Improvements**

**Alterations and improvements made prior to receiving a “Notice to Proceed with Improvements” are not eligible for reimbursement.**

### **D. Alterations**

The applicant must agree not to change or alter the improved facade without prior written approval from CDD for five (5) years from the date of the rebate check issued under the Façade Improvement Program.

## **IV. PROGRAM ASSISTANCE**

### **A. Financial Assistance**

Funding offered is a matching grant in which the City would *reimburse* the applicant fifty percent (50%) of total project cost, up to a \$35,000 maximum. There must be a minimum total project cost of \$7,000, of which this program will cover a minimum of \$3,500. Architectural design fees, up to \$2,000 per project<sup>1</sup>, may be included in the total cost of eligible improvements; this will translate into a maximum of \$1,000 that may be funded through this program.

The applicant’s match may be in the form of other financial aid (grant or loan) received from other agencies and/or banks. The City will only reimburse applicants after the applicant has paid his/her architect, contractor and vendor(s) in full and after the project is determined to have been completed in accordance with the contract between the City and applicant.

### **B. Technical Assistance**

CDD staff can provide guidance on facade improvements specific to individual storefronts. The applicant will have a choice of hiring his/her own licensed architect to work on the project from start to completion or requesting that the City-hired architect assist first with the conceptual design

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<sup>1</sup> CDD reserves the option to revise this amount.

of the facade. If the latter option is chosen, the applicant will still be expected to hire his/her own licensed architect to carry forth this conceptual design, from preliminary and final designs to completion of construction. The City will also monitor the progress of the project to ensure compliance with the “Scope of Services” outlined in the contract between the City and applicant.

Early meetings with City staff are necessary in order to help avoid misunderstanding as to the eligibility of proposals.

## V. PROCEDURES

All prospective applicants must follow the procedures in the order outlined below.

1. Applicant meets with City staff for initial project discussion;
2. Applicant files an application with CDD;
3. Applicant meets with City staff and architect<sup>2</sup> to further discuss program and design alternatives;
4. Architect prepares and submits conceptual design to applicant and CDD for review;
5. Architect<sup>3</sup> prepares and submits preliminary design(s) and budget estimates to CDD for review.<sup>4</sup> A meeting will be set up to discuss these plans;
6. Architect prepares final design drawings and submits them to CDD for final approval;
7. Upon approval of final designs by Review Committee, CDD will send a “Notice to Proceed with Soliciting Bids” to the applicant;
8. Applicant has sixty (60) days to solicit and submit three written bids from general contractors for the improvements. **Bids from each contractor must be itemized so that a cost is associated with each task or material to be installed**
6. If all the bids reflect the proposed improvements discussed and in the final design, applicant signs a contract with the City of Cambridge. The maximum funding amount indicated on the contract will be based upon the lowest bid for each proposed improvement<sup>5</sup>;
7. A pre-construction meeting takes place between the applicant, the selected contractor, the architect and CDD staff;
8. CDD sends applicant a “Notice to Proceed with Improvements”. **Any work completed prior to receiving the “Notice to Proceed with Improvements” will not be reimbursed;**
9. Applicant has sixty (60) days from the execution date of the contract to begin implementation of approved improvements;
10. Contractor constructs facade improvements as specified in the final design. **Any changes previously agreed upon and contracted must have prior approval of CDD.** It is up to the applicant to notify CDD of these changes;
11. Applicant notifies CDD once project is completed;
12. Architect certifies that the improvements comply with the final drawings and specifications.
13. The architect and contractor(s) must submit letters to the CDD acknowledging full payment by the applicant. The applicant must submit to the CDD copies of all paid invoices;
14. The City of Cambridge, Community Development Department, issues rebate check.

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<sup>2</sup> This step may involve the City-hired architect or the architect hired by the Applicant.

<sup>3</sup> “Architect” mentioned hereafter refers to the architect hired by the Applicant.

<sup>4</sup> If also applying for a loan, it is suggested that the loan application process be started at this step.

<sup>5</sup> Applicant may reject the lowest bidder(s), with CDD approval, if there is a good and substantiated reason.

CDD reserves the right to make adjustments regarding conditions and parameters outlined in these guidelines.

## **VI. TERMINATION**

The City of Cambridge has the right to terminate any agreement under the Facade Improvement Program if a participant is found to be in violation of any conditions set forth in these guidelines or if the project has been started prior to an executed agreement with the City of Cambridge.

## **APPLICATION AND INFORMATION**

If you wish to participate in the program and would like to set up a meeting with the Façade Improvement staff or if you would like additional information, please contact Chris Basler at CDD, (617) 349-4601 (voice) or 617-349-4621 (TTY).

The City of Cambridge Façade Improvement Program does not discriminate on the basis of disability. The program will provide auxiliary aids and services, written materials in alternative formats, and reasonable modifications in policies and procedures to persons with disabilities upon request.

Listed below is the Secretary of the Interior's standard for rehabilitation, which would be applied to historic structures seeking tax credits. These standards may also be considered as a guide for projects of lesser historical significance or for projects not seeking tax credits.

### **THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARD FOR REHABILITATION**

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for property that requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.
2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
3. All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
4. Changes that may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship that characterized a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.
6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural design of the availability of different architectural elements from other building or structures.
7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible, sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.
8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, and project.
9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.
10. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

## **INVESTMENT TAX CREDITS**

Federal historic preservation tax incentives are available for any qualified project that the Secretary of the Interior designates as a certified rehabilitation of a certified historic structure.

The percentage of Investment Tax Credits (ITC) are 20% credit for rehabilitation of certified historic structures and a 10% credit for rehabilitations of other buildings first placed in service before 1936.

You may be eligible for ITC if your commercial or income producing property is listed individually, qualified to be listed, or is a contributing building within districts in the National Register of Historic Places.

To qualify for the tax incentives and prior to beginning work on the property, property owners must complete a Historic Preservation Certification Application available from Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Massachusetts Historical Commission will review your application and submit it to the National Parks Service. A detailed description of the proposed rehabilitation work is part of the application. All rehab work must be done according to the Secretary of the Interiors Standard for Rehabilitation with Guidelines for Rehabilitation Historic Buildings. The underlying concern expressed in the Standards is the preservation of significant historic materials and features of a building in the process of rehabilitation. Certification is based on whether the overall project meets the Standards.

Upon completion of the rehabilitation the owner must submit a Request for Certification of Completed Work. A project does not become eligible for tax incentives until it is completed and designated by the National Parks Service.

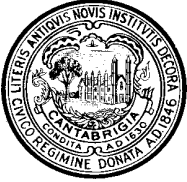
For further information call the Massachusetts Historical Commission (617-727-8470).

## **DISABLED ACCESS TAX CREDIT**

The 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act created a federal income tax credit for small businesses to help offset the costs of modifying buildings in order to comply with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) .The credit will cover 50% of eligible cost that exceed \$250, but do not exceed \$10,250. An eligible small business is one whose gross receipts do not exceed \$1,000,000 or whose workforce does not consist of more than 30 full-time workers. Examples of eligible access expenditures include the necessary and reasonable cost of removing barriers, providing auxiliary aids, and acquiring or modifying equipment or devices.

The Internal Revenue Code also allows a deduction of up to \$15,000 per year for expenses associated with the removal of qualified architectural and transportation barriers.

For further information contact the Internal Revenue Service, Office of the Chief Counsel, P. O. Box 7604, Ben Franklin station, Washington, D.C. 20044.



City of Cambridge Community Development Department  
**FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**  
**APPLICATION FORM**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. APPLICANT INFORMATION**

1. Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Web Site: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Business Organization of Applicant:  
☐ Corporation (d/b/a)      or      ☐ Partnership or      ☐ Sole Proprietorship  
Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Owners and Officers in Applicant's Business Organization  

| Position | Name and Address |
|----------|------------------|
| _____    | _____            |
| _____    | _____            |
| _____    | _____            |
4. Relationship of Applicant to the building to be renovated under Facade Improvement Program:  
☐ Owner:      Attach proof of ownership (tax bills, title deed, etc)  
☐ Tenant:      a) Attach terms, length, and expiration date of present lease, and  
                    b) Attach written permission from building owner to participate in Facade Improvement Program
5. Have all City of Cambridge taxes levied on the building and property described in this application been paid to date?  
No ☐      No ☐      If No, please attach explanation.  
\_\_\_\_\_

**II. PROPOSED PROJECT INFORMATION**

1. Description of Building to be rehabilitated:  
Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Section \_\_\_\_\_ Block \_\_\_\_\_ Lot(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Building Dimensions:  
Frontage \_\_\_\_\_ feet      Depth \_\_\_\_\_ feet      Height \_\_\_\_\_ feet  
Does the building contain residential units?      ☐ Yes      ☐ No  
☐ If yes, will the residential portion of the building be rehabilitated?      ☐ Yes      ☐ No

2. Describe the scope of the work proposed for the Facade Improvement Program:

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3. Please indicate the estimated total project cost or the total amount budgeted for improvements. The amount you list will effect the design provided by the City's consulting architect:

|                   | \$ | <b>Total Project Cost or Total Budget</b> |
|-------------------|----|---|
| <i>Breakdown:</i> | \$ | <i>Ground Level Exterior</i>              |
| <i>(if known)</i> | \$ | <i>Ground Level Interior</i>              |
|                   | \$ | <i>Upper Level(s) Exterior</i>            |
|                   | \$ | <i>Upper Level(s) Interior</i>            |

4. Please indicate the funding source(s) of the 1 to 1 match:

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5. Please list any loans that you are seeking in connection with this project (include type of loan, amount and source or financial institution):

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6. Please provide information on the architect responsible for your drawings, plans, and permits:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

### **CERTIFICATION**

The undersigned hereby represents and certifies to the best of his/her knowledge and belief that the information contained on this statement and any exhibits or attachments hereto are true and complete and accurately describe the proposed project, and the undersigned agrees to promptly inform the City of Cambridge Community Development Department of any changes in the proposed project which may occur.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Owner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commercial Tenant (if Applicant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

Social Security #: \_\_\_\_\_

Tax ID#: \_\_\_\_\_



City of Cambridge Community Development Department  
FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM  
PERSONAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Name

(Last)

(First)

(Middle Initial)

Date of Birth

Social Security No.

Home Phone

Street Address

City

State

Zip Code

Do you Own or Rent your home?

Who is your Primary Financial Institution?

(Please round Totals to 1,000)

| Assets                           | Total | Joint (Y/N) | Liabilities                     | Total Owed | Joint (Y/N) |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------|---------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Cash and Cash Equivalents        |       |             | Mortgage(s) Amount(s)           |            |             |
| Marketable Securities            |       |             | Other Loans                     |            |             |
| Non-Marketable Securities        |       |             | Credit Card Debt                |            |             |
| Real Estate Value                |       |             | 1.                              |            |             |
| Accts., Loans & Notes Receivable |       |             | 2.                              |            |             |
| Automobiles                      |       |             | 3.                              |            |             |
| Life Insurance (CSV only)        |       |             | Other bills                     |            |             |
| Other Assets                     |       |             | Unpaid Income/Real Estate Taxes |            |             |
|                                  |       |             |                                 |            |             |
|                                  |       |             | TOTAL LIABILITIES               |            |             |
|                                  |       |             | NET WORTH                       |            |             |
| TOTAL ASSETS                     |       |             | TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET WORTH |            |             |

Annual Gross Income for the most recent year:

\$

Monthly Housing Payment (mortgage payment & taxes or rent):

\$

Business Name

d/b/a or Trade Name (if different)

Business Address

P.O. Box

City

State

Zip Code

Business Phone

Fax Number

Tax ID Number

# of Employees

Year Established

# of Years Under Current Ownership

Nature of Business

SIC (if known)

Annual Revenues

Does your business have any loans from banks, other companies, or individuals?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, are all debts current?

☐ Yes

☐ No Please provide loan details as an attachment.

Are business payables current?

☐ Yes

☐ No If no, please attach an explanation.

Are you or your business party to any claim or lawsuit?

☐ Yes

☐ No If yes, please attach an explanation.

Have you or your business ever declared bankruptcy?

☐ Yes

☐ No If yes, please attach an explanation.

Are all your taxes current (payroll, sale/meals, federal, state, local, and business and personal property taxes)?

☐ Yes

☐ No If no, please attach an explanation.

Are you and your business and endorser, guarantor or co-maker of any obligation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, how much is the contingent liability?

\$

Please provide details as an attachment.